for the time being? At the same time, the whole gamut of election laws should be reviewed. This is number one. My second objection is this: You are widening the net of the staff that is required for the elections, including aided institutions, educational institutions. There are educational institutions and NGOs in this country even though they receive governmental aid, but they are working for different purposes and they are loyal to different political parties. Why should we allow those employees also to take part in elections? It is a moot question. Why are the Government employees requisitioned here? It is because they are the Government employees and whichever Government comes they will do what the Government asks them to do. But the NGOs, aided institutions, private organisations which get government assistance, are not above party lines. They are affiliated to some parties or the other. Is it wise to involve them in the electoral process? This is a moot question to be thought of. As far as the local bodies are concerned, the Government can get that staff as and when necessary. That is why I requested the Government to withdraw this Bill and not to press this Bill because there is no urgency at all. When there was an urgency, you had asked for an Ordinance and the President promulgated that Ordinance and the purpose is over. Now, when you are making it as a law, I think a rethinking is necessary on two counts. One is, we are discussing the electoral reforms. That will give an opportunity to relook at this item also. Number two, we are entering into a dangerous arena wherein we are involving the staff or the officials who have affiliated themselves to various political parties. This is a dangerous signal. So, I think there is no urgency for this Bill. I request the hon. Minister to withdraw the Bill and come before the House with a comprehensive Electoral Reforms Bill where in we can discuss the whole gamut of election laws. Thank you, Sir.

MESSAGE FROM THE LOK SABHA

Parliamentary Committee to review rate of dividend payable by Indian Railways to General Revenues

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Sir, I have to report to the House the following message received from the Lok Sabha signed by the Secretary General of the Lok Sabha:

> **"I am directed to inform you that Lok Sabha, at its sitting held on Tuesday, the 2nd June, 1998, adopted the following resolution:—**
>
> "That this House do recommend to the Rajya Sabha to agree to associate six members from Rajya Sabha with the Parliamentary Committee to review the Rate of Dividend which is at present payable by the Indian Railways to the General Revenues as well as other ancillary matters in connection with Railway Finance *vis-a-vis* the General Finance and to make recommendations thereon, and to communicate the names of the members so appointed to this House."

2. I am to request that the concurrence of Rajya Sabha in the said resolution, and also the names of the members of Rajya Sabha so appointed, may be communicated to this House."

I. STATUTORY RESOLUTION SEEKING DISAPPROVAL OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE, 1998

II. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMDNT) BILL, 1998—*Contd.*

SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI (Kerala): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I do not oppose this Bill. I agree with the objectives of this Bill. Such a provision was necessary because on many

occasions we did experience shortage of enough officers for election duty. So, this is an enabling provision for the Election Commission and the Electoral Office to deploy employees from other institutions for the election purpose. I want to raise two important issues here. One is, even in the present situation, there have been complaints about certain officers at different levels of State Governments. They avoid just and good officers and they will try to pick up those who are pliable and, therefore, such complaints were there. Now, because of this amendment the entire scope actually will be widening to include not only the Central Government employees and State Government officials, but all other employees in a given situation. So, there is a chance of misuse in which some may avoid genuine and good officers and they may try to pick up those who would be amenable to certain officials. I am not blaming all the officials. Some are mischievous. The mischief makers can misuse the wide net for chosing and using 'yes-men'. I would like to know from the hon. Minister the safeguards for controlling such officials. This is one thing.

The second important matter I would like to point out is, even now we experience some deficiencies in the Representation of the Poeple Act. Of course, the Representation of the People Act and Indian Penal Code do provide for initiating criminal prosecution with regard to certain offences connected with the election work but there are other things like small offences. The Election Commission cannot take cognizance of it. There are State Government employees, there are Central Government employees and there are local bodies' employees. The Election Commission has no disciplinary authority over these officials. Already there is this controversy. We have not yet settled that controversy and on top of it the scope is getting widened.

We would be recruiting even public sector employees and public companies' employees and employees of other establishments also. A person who is deputed for this work may commit a mistake. Who is going to take action against him? He will do a mischief and go back. Because the Election Commission has no jurisdiction over him to take any disciplinary action, how is the Government going to tackle this important issue? This is a long-pending issue. Even with the Government employees this is the thing. On many occasions the Election Commission brought such wrongs to the notice of certain State Governments. But they have not acted. On certain occasions actually the State Governments congratulated them. Now we are widening this aspect. We should also go into this particular aspect of taking disciplinary action against such wrong-doers. The Government should think about this matter. When we think of a comprehensive legislation, of course, we should apply our mind to these particular aspects. I agree with the sentiments expressed by my colleagues here. The Government should take steps to expedite the process of bringing in a comprehensive legislation. I know that the Government has called a meeting and it has constituted a Sub-Committee to go into some of these aspects. But, we have to expedite this process. Otherwise, such mistakes and such wrongs will continue to remain in existence. This is what I wanted to submit. Thank you, Sir.

श्री बंगारू लक्ष्मण (गुजरात): उपसभाध्यक्ष जी, वास्तव में तो यह बहुत छोटा अमेंडमेंट है, इस पर बहुत ज्यादा चर्चा करने की भी आवश्यकता नहीं थी और इसको बिना चर्चा के भी पास किया जा सकता था। चूंकि चर्चा इस पर हो रही है, जैसा कि कहा गया कि अभी तक यही अनुभव होता रहा है कि जब भी जो आवश्यकता पड़ी हमने एक आर्डिनेंस निकाला या लॉ को उस हद तक अमेंड किया, प्यूपिल रिप्रजन्टेटिव एक्ट को और फिर संसद के सामने सरकार को आना पड़ा। पिछले दिनों में चुनाव सुधार की बात नहीं हो पाई और कुछ समय ऐसे ही बीत गया। जैसे ही भारतीय जनता पार्टी और उसके मित्र दलों की सरकार को इसका अवसर मिला हमने राष्ट्रीय एजेण्डा तैयार किया और इस राष्ट्रीय एजेण्डा के अन्दर चुनाव सुधारों को सबसे महत्वपूर्ण स्थान दिया और ज्यों ही यह सरकार बनी तुरन्त इस पर विचार के लिए सभी दलों को बुलाकर उनसे

बातचीत की गई। जैसा कि कहा गया है कि इसके संबंध में एक समिति भी बनी है और एक प्रयास हो रहा है कि कम्प्रीहेंसिव तरीके से इलेक्ट्रोरल रिफार्म्स किए जाएं और सभी आसपेक्ट्स पर विचार करके एक सुविचारित कानून तैयार किया जाए। इसमें जितने भी पिछले चुनावों के अनुभव रहे हैं, जहां मसल पावर यूज किया गया, मनी पावर यूज किया गया और अनेकों प्रकार की जो धांधलियां समय-समय पर देखने के लिए मिलीं, उनको दूर करने के लिए और भारत के जनतंत्र को अच्छा सुदृढ़ रूप से रखने की दृष्टि से, बनाने की दृष्टि से इसके लिए कम्प्रीहेंसिव इलेक्ट्रोरल रिफार्म्स की आवश्यकता सरकार ने महसूस की है और उस पर काम शुरू हो गया है। अभी जैसा हमारे हनुमनतप्पा जी ने कहा कि जब कम्प्रीहेंसिव लेजिसलेशन आने वाला है तो इसको यहां लाने की क्या आवश्यकता है और उसी के साथ इसको लाया जा सकता है। जैसे कि सरकार की यह पहले से ही कोशिश रही है कि आम सहमति से, आम राय से सब चीजों पर विचार करना है, और चुनाव सुधार जो है वह राष्ट्रीय महत्व रखने वाला विषय है और इसीलिए सरकार यह चाहती है, इस सरकार में शामिल सारे ही दल यह चाहते हैं कि देश में जितने भी लोग हैं, जितने भी दल हैं, उन सबसे विचार-विमर्श करके सबकी सहमति से, सबकी आम राय से इन चुनावी बातों पर जो भी सुधार लाने हों, लाने की आवश्यकता हो सकती है। इसमें थोड़ा-बहुत समय लग सकता है और इस वर्ष के अंत में कुछ प्रदेशों के अन्दर चुनाव होने हैं। और भी चुनावों की बातें आ सकती हैं जैसे बाई-इलैक्शन्स वगैरह। इसीलिए उस कानून को इसके लिए रोकने की आवश्यकता नहीं है। मुझे लगता है कि इसको हमें पास कर देना चाहिए। जो अन्य महत्वपूर्ण मुद्दे हैं उन पर एक आम चर्चा होनी चाहिए, एक राष्ट्रीय बहस भी होनी चाहिए और सबकी सहमति से कम्प्रीहेंसिव लॉ इस सदन के सामने आए। इसी विचार के साथ मैं चाहता हूं कि सदन इसको अपनी अनुमति दे और इस बिल को पास कर दे।

SHRI N. THALAVAI SUNDARAM (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I support this Bill. First of all, I would like to refer to a particular point made by Shri Ramachandran Pillai, against officers. If you are appointing NGOs for election duty or if they are to be authorised to conduct an election, certain officers are supporting some political party or the other. This is evident from the last elections held in our State. There is need to amend the provision because all officers are politically motivated everywhere in our country. If there is no provision to conduct disciplinary proceedings against the concerned officer, even if you appoint people from undertakings or Universities, it will affect the election. Normally, when the election process starts, certain officers support certain political parties. For example, in Tamil Nadu, NGOs have a political inclination towards certain political parties. Sir, the hon. Minister who is sitting here from Tamil Nadu contested in the last election from Karoor Constituency and he knows very well as to how these officers behave with the inside agents and agents of the area. The point is, I welcome this Bill. I welcome the amendment regarding appointment of staff from undertakings and Universities. As far as selection of staff is concerned, there must be some provision. Suppose, any officer or staff affiliated to any political party is appointed as an election officer or conducts an election, some misuse of power will take place. I request the hon. Minister to bring in another amendment regarding appointment of officers at the time of election.

Another point is about shortage of staff during election time. I welcome this Bill. In every election, certain officers, certain staff are not interested to attend the election duties because teachers, lecturers and professors are put in as election officers. Normally, the Revenue Officers belonging to the concerned State or concerned area will have some favour in their mind for some particular political party. If you take the example of Tamil Nadu, you will find that certain NGOs normally collide with the D.M.K. Party. When this kind of officers canvas for a particular political party during the election, I request the hon. Minister to take necessary steps for taking action against those officers. Thank you for having given me an opportunity to speak on this. I support the Bill.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): Mr. Chitharanjan, are you withdrawing the resolution?

SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN: Sir, as has been pointed out here, there is no immediate necessity to really pass this Bill at the moment and as has been suggested, the whole issue could have been taken up together and a new legislation could have been brought. But, if the Government is insisting that it should be passed now, I do not have any objection. I agree with it and withdraw my resolution.

The Statutory Resolution was, by leave, withdrawn.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): The idea is only to legalise through the parliamentary process, what was done earlier.

THE MINISTER OF LAW, JUSTICE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI): Sir, I am very happy that some of our Members have given certain ideas in regard to this Bill. The hon. Member, Shri Hanumanthappa, said that this could be taken up along with the Bill on electoral reforms. Some other Members also shared the same views. Shri Chitharanjan also suggested that this could be taken up along with the Bill on electoral reforms. I am grateful that he has withdrawn his Resolution.

Sir, the Government is very serious about the electoral reforms. We have to bring a comprehensive Bill on electoral reforms at an earlier date. For that we have taken the necessary action. We called all the political leaders and had a meeting with them. In that meeting various things were discussed. We discussed 24 items. There were 17 items on which all of us felt that we have to give importance to these and include these in the Bill on electoral reforms. We also constituted a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Shri Indrajit Gupta to go through all the suggestions and submit the report at an early date.

But this Bill is somewhat different, Sir, even though it is a part of electoral reforms. The previous Government had promulgated the Ordinance on the request of the Election Commission. The Election Commission had once again requested the present Government also for extending the Ordinance. Based on that, the Cabinet took the decision and repromulgated this Ordinance. Some Members have said it is only for giving shape to certain things that this Bill has been introduced. Some Members felt that some officers who are put on election duty do not behave properly, some mischievous things take place. When we bring the Bill on electoral reforms, we will consider these things and see how and what measures can be taken to punish such officers.

The main purpose of this Bill is this. The Election Commission is still requesting us to give effect to this Ordinance and convert it into a Bill because whenever they conduct elections in certain States they face shortage of staff. Apart from that, we also know that the number of voters has increased, the number of polling booths has increased, but the area from which we pick up the election officials still remains limited. Now, we are not involving officers from private concerns. As Shri Pillai and Shri Hanumanthappa rightly said, officers from private or autonomous or aided bodies and institutions may be having political affiliations and their involvement may affect the election process. Most of the aided institutions also, to a certain extent, cannot violate the directions given to them because when the institutions are getting aid from the Government, they also have to follow a certain code of conduct.

When the institutions are getting aid from the Government, they would have some Code of Conduct and through that we can take some action. But if it is a self-financing institution and it is not getting

any aid from the Government, whatever the hon. Member says may be correct. But here, it is only aided institutions and universities, and they are functioning under certain laws. Therefore, I request Shri Hanumanthappa to support this Bill. In regard to the other suggestions whatever our Members said, we will definitely consider when the electoral reform bill is drafted. At that time we will improve upon it.

Since this provision has already been implemented through the Ordinance, it is better if our House passes this Bill so that it becomes an Act. I thank all the hon. Members for the contribution made on this discussion. We will definitely take into consideration whatever valuable suggestions have been given. Definitely we will include all those suggestions. Thank you, Sir.

SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: A public sector undertaking person can participate in political activity even remaining in public sector whereas in the case of Government, he has to resign. Even remaining in the public sector undertaking a public sector undertaking employee can contest elections. But, here in the case of a Government employee, he cannot contest elections unless he resigns. This is the major difference. Remaining in a public sector undertaking a person can carry on political activity, he can have political affiliations. How are you going to differentiate?

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: When we bring the Electoral Reform Bill, we will consider this.

SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: The point made by Mr. Hanumanthappa was this: You have promulgated the Ordinance and it was being implemented and you want to put it into the Statute Book. Why are you putting a wrong thing into the Statute Book?

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): The Minister has already said that the point made by Mr. Hanumanthappa is very important. What he has said is that the Election Commission is still insisting that it is finding some difficulty in some of the States. That is why it wants this leeway of this power.

SHRI S.B. CHAVAN (Maharashtra): Whatever explanation he has given is not satisfactory at all. Apart from the public sector undertakings, if officers are chosen from aided institutions, what will happen? The clarification given by the hon. Minister is not satisfactory. When officers from the State Government are employed, they know very well that till the time of the elections they are under the Election Commission. But, thereafter, they have to be under the State Government itself. And it becomes very difficult for them to carry out the orders given by the Election Commission. Now, here our aided institutions are themselves interested in seeing that the election results are vitiated in a particular manner. And if those very people who are being appointed as officers conduct the elections, it is bound to vitiate the entire election process. And that is why you have to satisfy yourself and if you can avoid it, it will be good. Since you have promulgated the Ordinance, we cannot possibly insist that it should not be converted into a Bill. The Election Commission may be told that as far as possible they should try to avoid any officer from aided institutions being appointed in these very sensitive positions so that the elections become fair. As it is, doubts are being expressed by people and that is why it becomes absolutely necessary that in order to make the elections very fair, you have to avoid officers from aided institutions being appointed.

प्रो० विजय कुमार मल्होत्रा (दिल्ली): उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, यह जो विषय उठाया गया है, बहुत ही महत्व का है और इसके काफी रिपरक्शन हैं। एडेड स्कूल हैं, जितनी भी एन०जी०ओज़० एडेड हैं, इनमें से सभी लोग पोलिटिकल कामों में हिस्सा ले सकते हैं। वे पोलिटिक्स में भी हिस्सा ले सकते हैं, उनके आफिस बीयरर भी हो सकते हैं। ऐसी किसी भी जगह से अगर बहुत ज्यादा लोग किसी जगह चुनाव की ड्यूटी पर लगा

दिये तो उसका असर पड़ सकता है। इसलिए यह जो बात चव्हाण साहब ने कही है कि मिनिस्टर इलेक्शन कमीशन से यह बात कर सकते हैं कि नया इलेक्टोरल रिफार्म्स बिल जो आ रहा है उसके आने तक यथासंभव वे कोई एडेड इंस्टीटयूशंस से न लें। बहुत इंस्टीटयूशंस और हैं, पब्लिक सेक्टर है, उसमें से बहुत से लोग लिए जा सकते हैं। इसलिए मैं समझता हूं कि इतना एश्योरेंस उनको देने में कोई कठिनाई नहीं होनी चाहिए कि इलेक्शन कमीशन को रिक्वेस्ट करें कि तब तक वे पब्लिक सेक्टर से ले लें, एडेड से न लें। मैं समझता हूं कि जब नया इलेक्टोरल रिफार्म्स बिल आएगा तो उसके अंदर इसको निकाल दिया जाए।

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE (West Bengal): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I would just like to add to what my professor friend has said.

Now, we have to replace this Ordinance by an Act. This we are going to do. But I would request the hon. Minister to take it up with the Election Commission that if there is any byelection or any election in between, till a comprehensive legislation comes, the Election Commission, while appointing the officers, though they are enabled by this law to appoint officers from aided institutions, should avoid it and the Government should ensure that this type of anomaly does not come.

When the comprehensive legislation comes, the hon. Minister can take note of the sense of the House and make the necessary amendment.

SHRI VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): I hope the hon. Minister would convey the sense of the House to the Election Commission.

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: Sir, I am thankful to the senior Members for having made this suggestion. I take note of it and I would convey it to the Election Commission. But I want to make a point here about the disciplinary action. The position is the same in the case of employees of aided institutions, as in the case of employees of Government, as far as disciplinary action is concerned. They are subject to the same discipline. It is the same thing.

As for the other point, I welcome the suggestion made. I take note of the sense of the House. I would definitely pass it on to the Election Commission.

Sir, I request the House to pass the Bill.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): This point has now been clarified by the hon. Minister that the employees of aided institutions are also subject to the same discipline, by the Election Commission. But Mr. Minister, still, the apprehension persists that these officers may side this way or that way. That is why it is better...

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: I take note of the sense of the House and I would defintely pass it on to the Election Commission that while appointing the officers...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI) Mr. Minister, please, let me finish. This particular Ordinance was promulgated before the General Elections. Probably, that kind of a need to draw upon a larger manpower is not necessary. That is why this suggestion has been made by friends from both sides. It is suggested that a request be made to the Election Commission that in the forthcoming elections, they should, as far as possible, avoid drawing upon the strength of aided institutions and that they should purely depend on the Government employees who are directly under the control and the discipline of the Government. I am quite sure this point would be conveyed by the Minister to the Election Commission.

SHRI H. HANUMANTHAPPA: Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, as I said, if it is a technicality of replacing the Ordinance by an Act, I would like to point out that the Government has not taken up all the Ordinances. They have allowed some Ordinances to lapse. Today, we are

making this into an Act and, at the same time, writing to the Election Commission that they should not act upon it. It does not seem to be proper. You pass a Bill, make it into an Act, and write to the Election Commission that they should not act upon it. Why should you not withhold this till you come forward with a compehensive Bill?

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): This has been replied to by the hon. Minister. The mover of the Statutory Resolution has withdrawn his Resolution. The House has expressed its sense. I think we should now abide by the sense of the House, which would be effectively conveyed by the hon. Minister to the Election Commission.

I would now put the Motion for consideration of the Bill to the House.

The question is:

"That the Bill further to amend the Representation of the People Act, 1951, be taken into consideration."

The motion was adopted.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): We shall now take up clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Substitution of new section for section 159 of Act 43 of 1951)

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): We shall take up clause 2. There is one amendment by Miss Saroj Khaparde. Will you like to move the amendment?

MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE (Maharashtra): Sir, I move:

That at page 2, *after* line 17, the following be *inserted*, namely:—

"(3) The Regional Commissioner or the Chief Electoral Officer, as the case may be, shall ensure that the staff requisitioned for election duties under sub-section (1) shall be given,—

(a) appropriate transport facilities from and to their residence and polling stations where they may be posted for election duty;
(b) adequate food, water and refreshment at the polling station;
(c) adequate security measures;
(d) timely payment of the allowances for election duties; and
(e) adequate opportunity to cast their votes either through postal ballot or through any other appropriate way."

मान्यवर, मैं यह जो संशोधन प्रस्तुत कर रही हूं उसके कई कारण हैं। उन कारणों को मुझे लगता है कि आपके समक्ष रखना बहुत जरूरी है। एक तो ऐसा है जो मैंने देखा, जो कर्मचारी चुनाव कार्यों में लगाए जाते हैं उन्हें एक तो ट्रांसपोर्ट या परिवहन उपलब्ध नहीं कराया जाता है, थोड़ी दूरी के लिए तो उन्हें उपलब्ध कराया जाता है, लेकिन बहुत दूर-दूर तक की हद के लिए उनको किसी प्रकार का साधन ट्रांसपोर्ट के रूप में प्रोवाइड नहीं किया जाता है। कई बार तो ऐसा भी देखा जाता है कि चुनाव स्थलों पर उनके लिए किसी भी प्रकार का इंतजाम नहीं होता है, जब मैं किसी भी प्रकार का इंतजाम कहती हूं तो उसका मतलब जैसे कि भोजन है, पानी है, उनके खाने-पीने का जो इंतजाम होता है, ऐसी कोई भी सुविधा उनके लिए उन चुनाव के स्थलों पर उपलब्ध नहीं कराई जाती है। कहीं-कहीं तो हम ऐसा भी देखते हैं कि उनके लिए जो हमको उचित सुरक्षा का इंतजाम करना चाहिए वह भी कभी हम उनके लिए देखते नहीं हैं। कई बार ऐसा होता है कि उनके जीवन को काफी खतरा भी बना रहता है और कई बार ऐसा भी नरेशन में आता है कि चुनाव होने के पश्चात् उनके जीवन के लिए जो खतरा बना रहता है उसकी भी कभी हम लोग दखल नहीं लेते, मतलब उसकी भी कभी हम लोग व्यवस्था नहीं करते हैं। तो यह एक बड़ी अजीब सी बात मुझे लगी और मुझे लगा कि संशोधन के माध्यम से मैं सदन के सामने वह रखूं।

इतना हीं नहीं, यह भी कई बार देखा जाता है कि चुनाव हो जाने के बाद भी कई वर्षों तक कर्मचारियों को जो चुनाव भत्ता मिलना चाहिए वह चुनाव भत्ता भी उनको नहीं दिया जाता है। ऐसे लोग कई बार चुनाव की जो ड्यूटी करते हैं, चुनाव के लिए मतबल जो अन्योन्य प्रदेशों में हम लोग उनको डेप्यूट करते हैं उन परिस्थितियों

में उनको अपना मतदान करने के लिए भी हम लोग उनको वंचित रखते हैं। तो ऐसी भी हम लोगों को कोई व्यवस्था करनी चाहिए कि वे अपना जो मतदान है, उसे आइदर पोस्टल वे से या किसी न किसी अन्य ढंग से, करने के काबिल होने चाहिए या मतदान करने के लिए उनके लिए कोई व्यवस्था करनी चाहिए।

इसीलिए मैंने यह आपके सामने संशोधन के माफूर्त जो अमेंडमेंट लाया है वह मैंने आपके माध्यम से सदन के सामने रखा है। अब इसके ऊपर सरकार चाहे तो विचार करे या फिर उसके ऊपर कोई आश्वासन दे।

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: Sir, as the hon. Member has said, sometimes many persons are not in a position to vote due to long distance to the polling booth from their residence. Even transport facilities are also not available. That is why we are thinking of increasing the number of polling booths to have polling booths at the nearest places so that the voters can go and cast their votes. We require more staff for that. That is why we are introducing a Bill on that also.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): But the thrust of the hon. Member's observation is on safety, comfort, food, transport etc. which are not arranged properly. I am sure that you will write about it to the State Governments and that the Government will take care of the important points which have been made. They are necessary. Therefore, she wants an assurance from you on that.

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: Definitely, we will write to the State Governments on the points made by the hon. Member.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU: The Minister seems to have misunderstood it. The hon. Member was talking about the facility for the polling personnel. But the Minister is speaking of the voters' difficulties.

MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: I am not talking about voters. I am talking about the staff deputed by the Government for election duty.

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: We will request the State authorities to give the necessary protection, transport facilities, food and other things required by the staff to stay there and to conduct elections. We will take all steps. We will write to the Election Commission in this respect.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): Bill of expenditure incurred should be prepared in time. All these things should be taken care of.

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: I will, I request the hon. Member to withdraw her amendment.

कुमारी सरोज खापर्डे: उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, मैंने संशोधन के माध्यम से जो मुद्दे उठाए थे और उनका जो जवाब माननीय मंत्री महोदय ने दिया, मुझे लगता है कि वह काफी समाधानकारक है। उन का जवाब और सदन के सामने उन्होंने जो आश्वासन दिया है, उसे ध्यान में रखते हुए, मैंने जो संशोधन दिया है, उसे विदड्रा करने की इजाजत चाहती हूं।

उपसभाध्यक्ष (श्री त्रिलोकी नाथ चतुर्वेदी): धन्यवाद।

The amendement was, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2 was added to the Bill

Clause 3 was added to the Bill.

Clause 1, The Enacting Formula and the Title were added to the Bill.

SHRI M. THAMBI DURAI: Sir, I move:

"That the Bill be passed."

The question was put and the motion was adopted.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): We have to take up the Merchant Shipping (Amendment) Bill also.

SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: It can be taken up tomorrow, Sir.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): Mr. Nitish Kumar has been here with us for some time. Let him make a statement. The House may like to extend the sitting

of the House in case the statement is not finished or till the clarifications are sought.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Blast on bridge number 237 between Gosaigaon-Chautara block section of new Coochbehar-New Bongaigaon section of North-East Frontier Railways Alipurduar Division on 2.6.1998.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): Sir.

I would like to apprise the House of an unfortunate incident of a blast on bridge number 237 between Gosaigaon-Chautara block section of New Coochbehar-New Bongaigaon section of Northeast Frontier Railway's Alipurduar division at about 03.35 hr.on 02.06.98. The blast occurred while a goods train Up New Guwahati Sugar Special was passing over the bridge.

While there has not been any derailment to the goods train which is still standing on the bridge; the blast has caused extensive damage to the bridge girders as a consequence of which the section is likely to remain closed for passenger traffic. Likely time of restoration is awaited.

Local Civil and Police authorities have arrived at the site. Divisional Railway Officials have also reached the site. All relief operations are under progress.

Prima-facie, the blast was caused by an Explosive Device. Police clearance has been obtained at 10.05 hrs. The Railway Security department has been asked to step up vigilance and keep a close watch on all railway installations.

प्रो॰ विजय कुमार मल्होत्रा: सर, मंत्री जी ने जो कुछ बताया, उसमें यह नहीं बताया कि कोई जख्मी हुआ या नहीं?

श्री नीतीश कुमार: सर, यह गुड्स ट्रेन है।

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE (West Bengal): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I would like to seek one clarification from the hon. Minister. Since the blast occurred in the early morning, I expected that by this time the Minister would give us a detailed information. I am happy that it was not a passenger train. So, there have not been any human casualties. We are saved from that. I do hope that we will get full information and he would keep the House apprised of it. From the statement which the hon. Minister has made, it appears that this is the result of the subversive activities which are going on. It was confined to some parts of Assam. I am afraid now it is spreading to border areas of Bengal and Assam. Both the Statement Governments as well as the Central Government will have to take necessary steps to protect this line. I would like to know from the Minister whether his Department has made any preliminary assessment in regard to the time which will be taken to make this bridge available for the regular traffic; and pending that what alternative arrangements will be made. I understand from the statement that it will not be commutable unless they carry out necessary repairs. If the hon. Minister has any information, he can enlighten the House on that.

SHRI S.B. CHAVAN (Maharashtra): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, the hon. Minister in the last paragraph of his statement said, "Police clearance has been obtained at 10.05 hrs." On what date it has been obtained has not been mentioned.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: Today.

SHRI S.B. CHAVAN: Today?

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: Yes.

SHRI S.B. CHAVAN: About what the clearance has been given by the police?

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: For restoration and other operations.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI): For the restoration of the railway line so that their investigation is not hampered. Mr. Minister, there should have been more explicit details on this matter.